JOHN WEBSTER AND TAUA MURU: THE SPACE BETWEEN CULTURES IN 1840S HOKIANGA

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On 24 May 1847, as he was drifting off to sleep, a British settler and trader named John Webster was woken in his home near Kohukohu—a small settlement located on New Zealand's Hokianga river—by the sound of a war party arriving on his front lawn.[1] As he got out of bed and looked out from his verandah, he was confronted by the sight of a group of armed Māori crowded inside the hut usually occupied by three of his Māori workers. The party was a taua muru, a hostile expedition whose purpose was to plunder property in order to right a perceived wrong, and the focus of retribution was Webster's workers, Pera, Terea, and Piko. Over the next twelve hours there was a standoff between the two camps, punctuated by moments of direct, armed confrontation. While Webster moved between the scene of the disturbance and the relative safety of his house, cutlasses were waved and pistol shots were threatened. Scuffles and ferocious yelling broke out and haka (ceremonial dances) were performed before the raiders departed, taking with them a box of Piko's belongings.

Ostensibly, this was a straightforward affair that followed the basic rules of taua muru. According to historian Angela Ballara, the rules of taua muru are based on the concept of utu, or the balancing of an action or injury received with an equal action so that mana (power/prestige) and social order are maintained (2003, 82–83). The taua muru that was carried out at Webster's homestead was rooted in an earlier disagreement between Piko and the men who conducted the raid. Allegedly, the men in the raiding party had stolen some of Piko's belongings during a previous visit to Webster's property. In retaliation, Piko made off with some of their possessions, saying he would hold on to them until his own goods were returned. Writing in his journal on 23 May, Webster noted that a subsequent attempt to resolve the dispute had seen some goods returned from both sides, but only after verbal insults had been thrown and one of the visiting party had threatened revenge (Webster 1847). In a wider sense, the raid was a continuation of tension between two iwi (tribes): Te Rarawa (based north of the Hokianga river) and Ngā Puhi (based on the south side of the river). The members of the taua muru were affiliated with the Te Rarawa people from further up the coast at Herekino and had gone to Hokianga to work for one of

the local Pākehā (European) sawyers. Conversely, Pera, Terea, and Piko belonged to a hapū (tribal group) from southern Hokianga that was affiliated with Ngā Puhi.

The form and course of the attack also followed a recognizable pattern. Traditionally, taua muru was a means of dispute resolution, which "punished offences, but was not intended to provoke war." In appearance, taua muru could look very much like a full-fledged war party, "with full sound effects and apparent fury: weapons were brandished, muskets were fired into the air, haka or war dances were performed in challenge, accompanied by blood-curdling yells and set to words which outlined the offence . . . so that the offenders were left in no doubt that they were considered to be the transgressors" (Ballara 2003, 103–104). Importantly, unlike engagements of war, killing either did not occur or was very limited during taua muru.

The act of plunder that took place on John Webster's lawn demonstrated many of the traditional characteristics of a taua muru, yet there were significant ways in which its conduct and resolution incorporated new cultural elements. Most of these new elements resulted from the involvement of Webster and a small number of other Pākehā. By conducting the taua muru on land occupied by a white man, the Te Rarawa party brought into play new forms of dispute resolution. Thus, Webster's front lawn became a literal as well as a metaphorical space between. In this space, both Māori and Pākehā might have wanted their own cultural norms to exclusively apply, but when it came to dealing with each other they accepted the limits of those norms, and in doing so they produced new ways of interacting and new rules of engagement.

Because the only written record of the taua muru was made by John Webster, any analysis of the episode must bear in mind the absence of an explicit Māori perspective. However, the account does provide a glimpse into the mind of a man who seemed to see himself as the master of the indigenous people he encountered, and cracks that appear in Webster's self-image throughout his personal narrative provide valuable insight into the relative positions of Māori and Pākehā at that time. Webster probably wrote his account for a British audience, or at the very least for members of his family in Scotland, and his journal reflects a propensity to cast himself in the leading role in the dramas of his life in New Zealand. Right from the start, when he wrote of seeing the taua muru arrive on his lawn, Webster portrayed himself as a major player in the affair—indeed, as the director of events. After seeing the raiding party, Webster

entered the sitting room to find his houseguest Mr Motte, his brother George, and Pera, Terea, and Piko arming themselves. According to Webster's journal for 25 May, he then took control of the situation:

> I went into our sitting room & found Motte Geo [George] & the boys loading guns & pistols, cutlasses & Bayonets were scattered about in all directions, Tatou ki raro I said (let us go below) I seized a cutlass Terea a gun & we two went down first. I stuck my cutlass in the earth unseen by the enemy close @ hand & Terea & I entered the hut confronting the party. Who are you and what want you here I asked, No answer, not a sound was heard, every man stood or sat still as statues leaning on their long spears their kakahus [garments or cloaks] drawn over their faces. I gave the fire a kick with my foot to make it blaze when I put my hand to two or 3 of their mats & drew them aside to see who they were I found them to be from Herekino. (Webster 1847)

After a brief standoff, Webster led Terea and Piko up the hill to the house, and waited for the raiding party to make the first move. All was quiet during the night, but in the morning a scuffle broke out:

> [W]e all rushed out I took a gun which I thrust in the verandah paling in case of the worst & be it understood if a gun had been fired by the other party I should immediately have supplied our lads with firearms instead of the spears & cutlasses. On our party coming out the taua commenced yelling quivering their weapons &c. I rushed down to the hut where two of our lads were scuffling with a party who were dragging out the Boxes I lent a hand to prevent them from being taken out of the hut the main body of the Taua were outside defying the lads on the hill We pushed those in the hut outside & shut the door. . . .Now was the savage sight all our boys party were on the Brow @ the House just above the Taua Both parties yelled & made hideous faces & ran about like demons stripped almost naked, all the Herekino party made a feint of rushing forward I called to our party to Kokiri, to rush down but they were wary being all youths, two of the Taua now came forward with muskets & presented them @ our lads I rushed forward in front of them and said, Ka tangi to pu aianei ki konei koutou puranga ai (fire a shot and your party shall lie in a heap where you are) I told them I would on the first shot supply my lads with guns and not one of them should escape, this intimidated them a good deal, they danced a war dance and retreated to their canoe when our lads rushed with a yell to the waterside & danced in defiance. (Webster 1847)

For his readers, at least, Webster successfully cast himself as the hero, the man who led the counterattack against the raiders. This self-image was in keeping with the identity he had constructed for himself as much as a decade earlier when he left his Scottish homeland for the antipodean colonies. Webster's

identity was initially formed in a Britain that enjoyed "a sense of superior difference" (Colley 2003, 369), based on what it saw as its place on the world stage and the blessings of Protestantism, moral independency, and the rule of law, which Britons believed made them the rightful rulers of the peoples with whom imperialism brought them into contact. This apparent right to rule was partly based on the development of a "clearer racial hierarchy," in which "tribal peoples . . . represented the least developed of societies because they had failed to generate a commercial society or a recognizable state" (Bayly 1989, 149; Bayly 2004, 110). According to this view, the best thing that could happen to the peoples of the world would be for them to become more like the British.

As an adolescent, Webster absorbed these ideas of British supremacy in relation to non-European peoples, and his first experience in the colonies served to reinforce them. In 1838 he went to Australia and became involved in two consecutive overland journeys driving cattle from Sydney to Adelaide. The South Australia through which Webster passed was seen by the British as an empty land, ripe for settlement. Aboriginals were either forgotten, or were viewed as unknowable, nomadic savages whose lack of obvious signs of civilization such as fixed settlement and cultivation meant they would wither and die (Hall 2002, 31, 38–39; Pocock 2005, 249).

Throughout his journeys, Webster recorded his impressions of the Aboriginal people he observed and encountered (see Webster 1908). Initially, Aboriginals were to him objects of fascination whose unavoidable demise he both predicted and lamented. However, they soon went from being a potential menace to a direct threat after Webster and his traveling companions were attacked by a group of Aboriginals who had been following them on the opposite side of a river. In the ensuing fight at least six Aboriginal men were killed. Whether he regarded Aboriginals as objects of curiosity or fear, Webster never dealt with them on an individual or personal basis. Most of his experiences with Aboriginals were through distant observation, and when contact became direct, he perceived them, like the new land, as something to be conquered. There was no point at which Webster had to acknowledge Aboriginals as people in possession of the land. For Webster, in Australia, there was no space where the rules of engagement between Native and newcomer were to be negotiated. Instead, his experiences there confirmed rather than challenged his identity as a member of the supposedly dominant cultural group. By the time he arrived in New Zealand, Webster was firmly accustomed to viewing himself in this way.

However, his experience in New Zealand differed markedly from that in Australia, and this would affect his ability to convincingly portray himself as a dominator of indigenous peoples. When he reached Hokianga in May 1841, Webster joined a small, mostly male, Pākehā community of approximately 160 people, which had grown up during the 1830s around the timber industry (British Resident Dispatches). However, the community was outnumbered by the approximately 3,600 Māori among whom they lived and on whom their continued presence depended (Lee 1987, 174; Buller 1878, 146). From the beginning of Pākehā settlement in the late 1820s, sawyers and traders had married into Māori communities, not only to satisfy the need for sexual intimacy, but also to secure the protection of patron chiefs. They had also had to accept that their cultural norms could not be made to apply to Māori, and they had to suppress their ideas of superiority in an environment where they did not have the upper hand. This continued to be the situation even after February 1840, when New Zealand was annexed to Britain under the terms of the Treaty of Waitangi. British law might have applied in theory, but in the 1840s it did not govern Māori communities, which continued to observe their own laws and customs.

When John Webster saw the taua muru arrive on his front lawn, he must have recognized this as a Māori response to a Māori dispute, regardless of his desire to see and portray himself as a central player and controller of events. At one point in his narrative he admitted as much when he wrote, "Our party mustered 12 only not including Motte Geo [George] & I, who as it is entirely a native quarrel cannot interfere more than by countenancing our lads" (Webster 1847). Here, at least, he was willing to accept the limits of his power and influence. Indeed, the taua muru was clearly being conducted according to largely nonviolent custom, despite Webster's perception that it was a dangerous and incendiary situation requiring him to protect the "lads." Yet one episode in the dispute also illustrates the limits of Māori willingness to force their rules on to Pākehā. When the taua muru arrived, Webster identified them as being from Herekino by drawing aside the garment from one of their faces. He noted, "This was a dangerous proceeding of mine to touch their garment or put my hand near their faces which are sacred. Had it been a native the insult would have been instantly resented, as it was they moved not when I touched them but their eyes glared like fire upon me" (Webster 1847). This willingness by Māori not to apply some laws to Pākehā, such as those relating to tapu, or the sacredness of places and people, was not

uncommon in Hokianga in the 1840s, and was a result of Māori desire to attract and retain as residents those Pākehā who could provide access to material goods and trading opportunities (Maning 1922, 129; White 1846; Webster 1847). It was therefore in both parties' interests to accept the limits to which their rules might apply to each other. While on the one hand demographic weakness and dependence on Māori meant that Pākehā were unable to force Māori to live by European laws, on the other Māori were unwilling to alienate Pākehā and risk losing the economic benefits they brought. This was the reason why Webster, contrary to his sense of racial supremacy, had to acknowledge that the taua muru was "a native quarrel" that was beyond his power to control, even though it took place on what he regarded as his own property. Similarly, it was the probable reason why the members of the taua muru, who had come to Hokianga to work for Pākehā, tolerated Webster's provocative breaking of tapu.

Instead of dominance by one party over the other, there arose at such times a space between where the norms and laws of neither culture uniquely applied or held sway over all participants. In this space a form of cultural production arose in response to the complex circumstances created by cross-cultural interaction. Here, the customs of both cultures could coexist, applying to some participants but not others; alternatively, as will be seen, the customs could be melded to create new cultural norms. Greg Dening described this sort of space as liminal, as a place of "thresholds, margins, boundaries," as an "in-between" place where ways of being were defined and refined (1997, 2). In Hokianga, boundaries were maintained at times. Māori continued to live by their indigenous customs, and Pākehā largely lived according to European norms. However, where boundaries met—a space linguist Mary Louise Pratt referred to as the *contact zone*—new cultural forms could emerge. Pratt deliberately chose the term *contact* "to invoke the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures" and "to foreground the interactive, improvisational dimension of colonial encounters" (1992, 7). This type of improvization was present in Hokianga as Māori and Pākehā came in contact with one another and negotiated which rules would apply to whom and when.

In the case of the taua muru, the space between was both literal and metaphorical; it was brought into being because the taua muru was a Māori custom that took place on land occupied by a Pākehā. Webster's lawn became the site on which the rules of engagement were negotiated. While the taua muru followed a recognizable, largely ceremonial course, Webster's involvement

added a complexity to proceedings that might not have existed had the taua muru taken place elsewhere. This became particularly clear in the aftermath of the taua muru. One response occurred entirely between the Māori protagonists, involved no Pākehā, and was conducted according to tikanga Māori (Māori custom). Pera, Terea, and Piko's hapū from the head of the Hokianga river organized a war party to go up the Mangamuka river—where the Herekino party were staying—to seek utu for the perceived wrong done to their people and to regain Piko's possessions. This was done against the advice of their allies, but they turned back only when Wharepapa, the Te Rarawa-affiliated chief from Kohukohu, warned them to call off the war party.

Another response, however, appears to have resulted from Webster's involvement in the taua muru. Once the Herekino party had departed, chiefs Hone Paraone and Tutu from across the Hokianga river at Motukiore, arrived. According to Webster's journal entry of 25 May, Hone Paraone proceeded to say, "I hear has the house of a white man been entered by a taua of Maories what is the cause of this violence did they think they were in a native village . . . had they [the two chiefs] heard of the taua they would have come quick and the party would have been returned weeping instead of carrying off a Box." Hone Paraone then said that if Webster gave his consent, they would go to Mangamuka, fight the Herekino party, and recover the goods. Webster responded: "I told them that being a white man I would not have any thing to say on the subject lest I should be judged hereafter but if they went of their own accord well and good, he said they would not go unless I asked them which I declined" (Webster 1847). From Webster's account, Hone Paraone and Tutu's concern lay in the fact that the taua muru had taken place at the home of a Pākehā, and it is possible that Webster's assumption was accurate. The two chiefs may have viewed Webster and his establishment as being within their territory and therefore under their protection. Their offer to Webster can perhaps be seen as an attempt to extend customary law on behalf of a Pākehā for whom they felt a responsibility. Webster's declining of the offer could be perceived as a rejection of that relationship as much as a desire not to be "judged hereafter," a rejection that Hone Paraone and Tutu accepted.

Webster's occupation of the land on which the altercation took place was certainly a decisive factor in the third response to the taua muru. The day after the dispute, Webster advised Terea and Piko to go to the Bay of Islands—located on the east coast of New Zealand's Northland region—and report the theft of the

goods to the Pākehā authorities stationed there: "I called the boys into the room & advised Piko & Terea to go to the Bay altho it is quite against the tikanga Maori or native usage to apply for redress to Pakehas yet they consented to go the taua being made on a white man's establishment" (Webster 1847). Here, it seems, the location of the dispute was vital. Despite the taua muru being fought largely according to Māori custom, the fact that it involved a Pākehā and land he occupied opened up the possibility that Pākehā means of dispute resolution might have a place, even for Māori.

The three responses illustrate existing and new cultural norms that coexisted in the space between cultures where no one set of rules held sway. The first response illustrates the continuance of Māori custom between Māori; no Pākehā were involved and no cultural melding took place. The second and third responses, however, show the innovation that could arise when both Māori and Pākehā were involved. The third response, in particular, illustrates a new type of cultural production. For one of the first times, Māori were willing to seek redress from Pākehā law, to see themselves and their adversaries as being subject to that law, but only because they were willing to see the dispute as going beyond being an entirely Māori affair.

For John Webster, whose adolescence and early colonial experience had taught him to see himself as a member of a superior group, the realization that he was not master of all situations in which he found himself might have proved disquieting, but it was a reality of life in Hokianga in the early years of Māori–Pākehā interaction. And the location of the dispute—Webster's front lawn—placed it in the space between, where the cultural norms, laws, and customs of both Māori and Pākehā mingled and enabled new rules of engagement to be formulated.

Note

1. Hokianga is located on the west coast of New Zealand's Northland region.

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Abstract
In 1847, a taua muru, or hostile raiding expedition, was conducted by a group of Māori on land occupied by John Webster, a British settler and trader. The purpose of the raid was to reclaim goods the party believed had been wrongly taken by three of Webster's Māori workers. Although the taua muru was primarily between Māori participants and was carried out largely according to Māori custom, the involvement of Webster and other Pākehā in the melee created a space between, where the norms of both cultures were able to coexist. In that space, both Māori and Pākehā may have wanted their own cultural conventions to exclusively apply, but when it came to dealing with each other they were forced to accept their limitations. This article uses the taua muru as a case study to examine the emergence of new cultural forms and their impact on

one British settler whose imperial identity was challenged in an environment where his and other settlers' racial and cultural superiority could not be assumed.

KEYWORDS: New Zealand, Hokianga, culture contact, Māori, Pākehā, taua muru